

From Heaven Or From Men?

Lesson 1: The Necessity And Source Of Authority



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

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Learn about the need for authority in the physical and spiritual realms and that God is the source of all authority

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Study Number: DGW133

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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From Heaven Or From Men?

Lesson 1:

The Necessity And Source Of Authority

There is much diversity in the world we live. Not only is there much cultural and ethnic diversity, but there is great diversity in how people live. There is much diversity in what people consider to be right and wrong. There is much diversity in the things people believe to be true. There is much diversity in how people express their religious beliefs and worship.

In fact, even within those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, there is much diversity. There is much diversity in the churches those who profess to follow Christ have joined. Though there are some similarities, there are many differences in doctrine, in the organization, structure, and worship of the churches, in the practice of their faiths, etc.

The observance of all these facts should raise some basic questions pertaining to the realm of authority. Is everyone right in their own decisions about right and wrong? Or, is there a single standard that must be applied to determine what is right and what is wrong in all areas of life?

There are two things that are absolutely necessary in order for there to be authority: Power and right. No one has the authority to set a standard for others to follow in their lives without *both* of

these factors. There must be power to control the conduct of others and right to control the conduct of others.

So, we need to consider whether there is any who has both power and right to establish and control how we should live our lives. Certainly, this question is an absolutely essential one. For, if there are none who have authority over our lives, then we are right to live in whatever ways we choose to live. Yet, if there is one who has authority over our lives, then we must learn how to submit ourselves to Him. This would certainly effect every area of our lives: The decisions we make, our attitudes, our beliefs, our homes, how we do our jobs, the churches we join, how those churches should function, etc.

In the first lesson of this series on Bible authority, we want to establish a solid foundation. In order to come to any kind of agreement about how we should and should not be living our lives, we must understand the subject of authority. To do that, we must first understand the necessity and source of authority.

The Need For Authority

Is there even a need for authority? Why is it unreasonable to believe that we all should simply live in whatever ways we desire to live? Why can't we all just decide what is right and what is wrong for ourselves? Let's spend a few moments considering the need for authority.

In the physical realm

Although this study will be primarily focused on the greater applications of authority pertaining to the spiritual realm, the need for authority can be demonstrated in the physical realm. All around us, people recognize the importance of authority in the physical realm. They recognize that it is necessary in order to provide structure, to have common laws that govern us, to have order rather than chaos, etc. Let's consider just a few examples.

(1) In the government. Can you imagine what it would be like for a nation to be run without

authority? There would be no leaders. There would be no laws that would govern us. There would be no common acceptance of right and wrong. Everyone would simply be living however he/she would desire to live. There would be no justice – because there would be no laws to prohibit wrongdoing. There would constantly be conflict, chaos, and confusion.

(2) In the workplace. Can you imagine what it would be like for a business to be run without authority? There would be no bosses. There would be no time clock to punch. There would be no direction for the organization. There would be no common standards of operation. There would be no assurance of compensation for the work that is done. Everyone would simply be conducting himself/herself according to personal desires and ambitions. There would constantly be conflict, chaos, and confusion.

(3) In school. Can you imagine what schools would be like (at any level) for them to be operated without authority? There would be no principals, deans, teachers, or professors. Everyone would be able to conduct himself/herself in the ways that seemed right to each one. Everyone would be able to present ideas to their classmates – and there would be no way of determining which information is true and which is false. There would be no standard to use to grade examinations and determine whether the responses of the pupils were right or wrong. There would constantly be conflict, chaos, and confusion – and there would be no real education.

(4) In the home. Can you imagine what homes would be like for them to operate without authority? Husbands/fathers, wives/mothers, and children would all be living according to their individual desires. There would be no direction provided. There would be no discipline – because there would be no right or wrong way to act in the home. There would be rules. There would be no leadership or structure. There would constantly be conflict, chaos, and confusion.

In the spiritual realm

You see, we recognize the need for authority every day of our lives. We recognize it when we approach a stoplight in our vehicles. We recognize it

when we pay for our groceries at the supermarket. We recognize it when we punch the time clock to begin our workdays. We recognize it whenever we take examinations at school. We recognize it when we do chores in the home.

But, even more important than recognizing the need for authority in the physical realm, we must also recognize the need for authority in the spiritual realm. We must recognize that we have been in great need of guidance and direction in order to understand what is right and wrong, pertaining to our souls. Think back to the beginning of this lesson. We have seen that mankind is divided as to what is right and what is wrong in these areas. And, like we have observed, this has resulted in constant conflict, chaos, and confusion – as everyone simply chooses to live in whatever ways they desire to live. They practice their religion however they believe is appropriate or that feels “right” to them.

Yet, we must question whether authority exists in the spiritual realm. We have already learned that it exists (and needs to exist) in the physical realm. Why would it be any different in the spiritual realm? Does the God who created all things really not care how people live their lives? Does He really not care how people try to serve and worship Him? Does He really desire His creation to be in constant conflict, chaos, and confusion about what is right and what is wrong? And, is it really in man’s best interest (spiritually) to live only according to his own desires, beliefs, and standards?

God, The Source Of All Authority

It is at this point in our study (having established the need for authority in both the physical and spiritual realms) that we must consider the authority of God. All authority can be traced back to the God who created all things. Without God, there would be nothing that exists. Therefore, there would be no authority.

God is Lord of heaven and earth

Remember the two elements that are necessary in order to have authority. These are power and right. Certainly, God possesses both of these over mankind – and over all things. God is the only one who had the ability to create all things and, by extension, He is the only one who has the right to control all things.

Read the first two chapters of Genesis, pertaining to God's creation of this world. Genesis 1:1 simply states, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Through these two chapters, we see God creating things like light, the waters, the dry land, the grass, the trees, the sun, the moon, the stars, the birds, the fish and sea creatures, the land-dwelling animals, mankind, and the institution of marriage. His power over all of these things gives Him the right to control all of these things. Therefore, as Acts 17:24 says that the God "who made the world and everything in it" is "Lord of heaven and earth." He is Master of all that exists in both the physical and spiritual realms! He has all authority.

Think about it this way. Suppose you used your own ability to create a business. You used all of your own resources (including your money and time) to create this business from scratch. Now, you are beginning to be successful enough that you can hire some employees to help you with your business. Who has the authority? Is it the employees you hire? Can they come in to your business and decide to work however they desire to work? Can they unilaterally make changes to the kind of product your business produces? Of course not! It is *your* business. You have both power and right to control your business. Those you hire only have authority if you give them that authority.

In much the same way, God's creation does not have the authority – unless He has given them authority in some area. God is the only one who has both power and right to control all things! Therefore, mankind must live according to the authority of God! So, He has authority over how we live our lives, over the decisions we make, over our homes, over how we conduct ourselves in business, over the church, over the government, etc.

Now, God has delegated some authority in these areas (i.e. to governmental leaders, see Romans 13:1-7; to husbands and fathers, see Ephesians 5:22-33; to elders of the church, see Hebrews 13:17). Still, God has the ultimate authority in every aspect. And, even when these human leaders with authority instruct something that is contrary to God's will, we must determine to "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29)!

But, there is a problem to consider. How can we know the mind of God so as to obey His authority? We are simply incapable of knowing the mind of God by ourselves because it is far too magnificent for us to comprehend! Romans 11:33-36 makes this point. "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?' 'Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?' For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."

Certainly, He has communicated His will to mankind in various ways throughout time. Sometimes, He directly spoke to individuals (i.e. like He did with Adam, Noah, Abraham, etc.). Sometimes, He communicated with individuals through dreams (i.e. like He did with Joseph, Peter, etc.). Sometimes, He communicated His will through the Holy Spirit directing individuals (i.e. like He did to the prophets and apostles – who would tell others the things they had been told). At one time, He communicated His will to the nation of Israel through the Law He revealed to Moses. At one time, He communicated His will to people through Jesus Christ living on earth and directly teaching the people He interacted with. The Bible contains many examples of how God has revealed His will throughout the millennia.

All authority given to Jesus Christ

Even within those who possess the nature of being God (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit), there is an order. For instance, 1 Corinthians 11:3 says that "the head of Christ is God." Therefore, all authority (as we have already seen) begins with God, the Father – even though both Jesus Christ and the

Holy Spirit possess the full nature of being God (Deity).

Yes, God has communicated His will to mankind in various ways (as previously demonstrated). But, according to Hebrews 1:1-3, God has “spoken to us by His Son.” The passage states: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Observe the fact that when Jesus lived on this earth, He recognized the need for authority and taught that He did all things by the authority of the Father. Listen to John 12:48-50. “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him — the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.”

As the Son of God, Jesus Christ was able to demonstrate authority over all things. With authority, He commanded unclean spirits and they obeyed Him (Mark 1:27). With authority, He rebuked the winds and the sea and they obeyed Him (Matthew 8:23-27). And, some among the people even recognized that He taught them as one having authority – and not just as other men (Matthew 7:28-29).

Just prior to ascending into Heaven, Jesus instructed His apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel (see Matthew 28:19-20). But, even in giving His followers this instruction, He made a statement concerning authority. Verse 18 says, “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’”

Notice clearly that the Father had given Jesus Christ *all* authority. In fact, on the mount of Jesus’ transfiguration, the voice of God, the Father, declared concerning Jesus, “This is My beloved Son,

in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him” (Matthew 17:5)! Yes, we must listen to Jesus because He has all authority.

In fact, beginning with the first Pentecost after Jesus’ ascension into Heaven, those who wanted to please God did everything in the name of Jesus (note that to do everything in Jesus’ name is to do everything by His authority). They taught in His name (see Acts 4:11-12; Acts 9:27, 29), they baptized in His name (see Acts 2:38; Acts 19:5), they performed miracles in His name (see Acts 3:6; Acts 16:18), they issued commands in His name (see 2 Thessalonians 3:6), and they pleaded with others in His name (see 1 Corinthians 1:10).

Today, those who desire to live pleasing to God must follow their righteous examples and continue to do all things in the name (by the authority) of the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 3:17 says, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Please recognize that this does, in fact, involve *everything* – every word, every thought, every action, our expressions of worship, the ways in which we try to serve God, how we conduct ourselves in the home, how we conduct ourselves in business, all things pertaining to the church, etc.

The Bible contains the words of God

But, since Jesus does not walk on this earth today and directly teach people today, how is it that we can know the mind of Christ so as to do all things by His authority? This was the work of the final Person who possesses the full nature of being God: The Holy Spirit. In fact, as we will observe, the Holy Spirit is the only one who is uniquely qualified to accomplish this work.

Listen to what Jesus told His apostles about the Holy Spirit prior to ascending into Heaven. In John 14:25-26, Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” In John 15:26, Jesus said, “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit

of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.”

And, in John 16:12-15, Jesus said, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.”

The Holy Spirit, therefore, would come *after* Jesus ascended into Heaven and lead the apostles (and prophets) into all truth. He would both put them in remembrance of the things Jesus taught while He was on this earth and He would teach things they were not ready to receive whenever Jesus Christ was on this earth. But, please notice the authority that would be involved in this. Notice that the Father would send the Holy Spirit in Jesus’ name, He comes from the Father, and would speak by the authority of Christ (not His own).

Now, as I have already stated, the Holy Spirit was uniquely qualified to accomplish this work. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 says that “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” Listen to verse 16: “For ‘who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.” Just as our spirits know what is in our minds and can reveal our minds to others, God’s Spirit knows what is in God’s mind and can reveal it to others. So, it is through the words revealed by God’s Holy Spirit that we can know what is in the mind of Christ – who speaks with the authority given to Him by the Father!

Ephesians 3:3-5 will also prove to be helpful in understanding how it is we can know the mind of Christ. Paul wrote, “how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons

of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.” Similarly, 2 Peter 1:20-21 says that prophecy does not come by the will of man, “but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”

So, just as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit has worked to reveal God’s truth to man. He has done so by revealing this truth to the apostles and prophets. And, as these words were recorded in written form within the pages of the Bible, we can know the mind of Christ. Thus, the Bible is a fully authoritative book that perfectly reveals the will of God to mankind.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 helps us to see that this is true. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Every word contained in the pages of the Bible is from God. Specifically, the instructions contained within the New Testament are given for mankind today (since the Old Testament Law and its religious observances were nailed to the cross, see Colossians 2:14). Now, in order to live in a way that is approved of God, we must have Bible authority for all things that we do. In the pages of the Bible, God reveals His entire will to mankind. Therefore, when we study it we can know everything He wants us to believe, we can know all of the changes He wants us to make, and we can know everything that He wants us to be doing that will please Him. However, if we act without Bible authority, we will not do everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

From Heaven Or From Men?

We have now observed the necessity of authority in both the physical and spiritual realms and we have traced how God (who possesses all authority) has revealed His will to mankind. Specifically, we have discovered that the words that are written in the pages of the Bible are from God (inspired of the Holy Spirit), fully reveal God’s will to mankind, and are entirely authoritative. Now, we are faced with a choice. Whenever we live our lives

and make decisions, we will either act according to God's authority or according to man's authority.

Matthew 21:23-27

“Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, ‘By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?’ But Jesus answered and said to them, ‘I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John — where was it from? From heaven or from men?’ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘If we say, “From heaven,” He will say to us, “Why then did you not believe him?” But if we say, “From men,” we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet.’ So they answered Jesus and said, ‘We do not know.’ And He said to them, ‘Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.’”

This passage records an interesting exchange between Jesus and some of the Jewish leaders over Jesus' authority. Now, Jesus was not trying to dodge their question about authority. Rather, Jesus was trying to get them to be honest with themselves and with others. But, in this passage, Jesus is seen as identifying only two options concerning where authority originates. It is either from heaven (from God) or from men.

Everything that we do in our lives must be carefully evaluated by this same question. We must ask whether the things we say and do are authorized by God or only by men. These are the only two options – and we want to now briefly examine each one.

From men?

There are many people who attempt to justify their actions on the basis of having *subjective authority*. This is authority that man derives from within himself or from other men. This authority is not concrete. It is able to be changed upon the changing attitudes, opinions, moods, etc. of man.

But, is authority derived from within mankind acceptable to pleasing God? God says it is not! For instance, Isaiah 55:8-9 demonstrates that

God's ways are much higher than man's ways. “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,” says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.’” Therefore, as we have already seen, mankind is not even able to know what pleases God or what does not please God unless God reveals it to mankind.

Jeremiah 10:23 says, “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.” Without God's revelation of His will, we are incapable of living our lives in a way that will please the God who possesses all authority. In fact, even when we try to act in ways that seem right to us, we often fail to please God. Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”

There are many Bible examples that demonstrate this principle. For instance, (1) in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve did what they believed to be right in eating of the tree that God had forbidden. They were convinced that it would be okay and acted according to their own ideas. However, they experienced the consequences of violating God's authority. (2) In Genesis 4, Cain acted contrary to the authority God had given when he made an offering God did not approve of and when he killed his brother Abel. It was only Abel's sacrifice that was approved by God whenever he submitted to the Divine authority. (3) In Leviticus 10, Nadab and Abihu attempted to use fire that was unauthorized in their offering to God. However, God was not pleased with their decision and sent out fire from Heaven to destroy them.

There are many Bible examples of individuals who did what was right in their own eyes (see Judges 21:25). However, they all demonstrate to us that God does not approve of those who find authority from man and reject His authority. Similarly, there are many people who do what is right in their own eyes *today*. They believe that they can justify their actions through any number of subjective standards of authority. Consider some common examples of subjective standards that men try to appeal to today.

(1) Some try to find authority through the opinions and “wisdom” of other men. Yet, we have already seen that God’s ways are far above the ways of man (see Isaiah 55:8-9). In fact, 1 Corinthians 1:25 says that the “foolishness of God is wiser than men.” God is not pleased any time we listen to man’s opinions rather than listen to Him. This even includes situations in which the majority opinion of man goes against God’s will (see Exodus 23:2 and Matthew 7:13-14) and when those we love and trust have opinions that go against God’s will (see Matthew 10:34-39).

(2) Some try to find authority through their feelings and their own consciences. They look to do whatever feels right to them, that they can do in “good conscience.” Yet, Jeremiah 17:9 says that man’s heart is “deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked.” You see, mankind often fills his heart with things that are contrary to God’s will. Therefore, things that God does not approve often *feels* right to man. Furthermore, Acts 23:1 and Acts 26:9-11 demonstrates that Saul had killed and persecuted Christians in “all good conscience.” Still, his “good conscience” did not make his actions pleasing to God.

(3) Some try to find authority through man’s traditions. Some justify their actions by appealing to the “way things have always been done.” Yet, Jesus revealed that some man-made traditions cause us to violate the authority of God. In Matthew 15:1-14, Jesus said that some Jewish leaders had “made the commandment of God of no effect” by their traditions. And, He condemned them, saying that their hearts were far away from God and worshiped God in vain by teaching the doctrines of men.

(4) Some try to find authority through doctrines of man. Many hold to man-made doctrines in addition to some of God’s doctrines. Yet, the apostle Paul warned that those who preached any other gospel besides what God has revealed would be doomed to destruction (see Galatians 1:6-12). Therefore, as the apostle John warned, we must only abide in the doctrine of Christ – and must refuse to accept any other doctrine (see 2 John 1:9-11).

(5) Certainly there are many subjective standards mankind appeals to in order to justify and

authorize their actions. However, every one of these subjective standards of authority fails to lead us in a way that will please God! Therefore, if we discover that anything we do is only by the authority of men, we must get away from it!

From heaven?

Here is the other option. Rather than deriving authority from man, we must get all authority from God. We have already seen that we do this by establishing Bible authority for all that we do. His word is an *objective standard* of authority. That is, God’s word does not change. It is not based on our personal feelings, interpretations, opinions, prejudices, etc. This standard of authority looks outside of mankind for authority – to the one who possesses all authority (Jesus Christ)!

As we consider why we should submit to the objective standard of authority God has revealed in the pages of the Bible rather than our own subjective standards of authority, we need to consider the coming Judgment. The Bible clearly warns us that this God who is Lord of heaven and earth will judge us all one Day by Jesus Christ (see Acts 17:31). 2 Corinthians 5:10 states, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

The words of God contained in the pages of the Bible reveal the objective standard Jesus Christ will use to judge everything you have thought, said, and done while you have lived on this earth. Remember that Jesus said, “the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). Similarly, Revelation 20:11-15 pictures the final Judgment scene and states that the dead will be “judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (i.e. the books that reveal the will of God).

This being the case, the only way that we can be prepared for this Judgment is to live our lives according to Bible authority. If we have kept the instructions God has revealed in the pages of the Bible, we will be eternally rewarded in Heaven. But, if we have not kept the instructions God has revealed

in the pages of the Bible, we will be eternally condemned to Hell (see Galatians 6:7-8).

Therefore, our lives must be conducted in strict adherence to the authority God has revealed in the pages of the Bible. 2 Timothy 1:13 instructs that we hold fast to “the pattern of sound words” contained in the pages of the Bible. These words present a pattern for how we must live in every area of our lives. There is no area of our lives that the Bible leaves untouched.

And, we must heed Jesus’ warning about the need for obedience in Matthew 7:21-23. Although some may think that it is enough just to believe in Jesus and do *some* good things in Jesus’ name, Jesus teaches that we must obey God in all things or else we sin against God and will be everlastingly punished. He taught, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

Conclusion

God is the source of all authority because He is Lord of heaven and earth. He has spoken to us today through His Son, Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit has revealed the mind of Christ to us in the pages of the New Testament. Therefore, if we desire to live our lives to please God, we must establish Bible authority for everything we do. This is, in fact, the only way for us to do “all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (as instructed in Colossians 3:17). In the remainder of this study, we will be building on this foundation to learn how to establish and apply Bible authority, as well as evaluating our attitudes toward Bible authority.

Study Questions

What two elements are essential to having authority?

1. The Need For Authority

Demonstrate the need for authority in the physical realm.

Demonstrate the need for authority in the spiritual realm.

2. God, The Source Of All Authority

How and why does God have all authority?

What authority has been given to Jesus Christ? Explain your answer.

How has God’s word been made known today?

3. From Heaven Or From Men?

What question did Jesus ask in Matthew 21:23-27? Explain the context of this question and the continued importance of this question today.

Is authority derived from within mankind? List some common standards of authority mankind often appeals to. Explain why they are either appropriate or inappropriate as standards of authority.

Where must we get all authority? Why must our authority come from this source?